

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 184 – An Act extending through November 8, 2022, several changes regarding election administration as a result of covid-19 and concerning eligibility to vote by absentee ballot; and
in SUPPORT of HB 5262 An Act revising certain absentee voting eligibility statutes**

Co-chairs Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, ranking members Senator Sampson and Representative Mastrofrancesco and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

I respectfully submit testimony in my role as Director of the Nancy A Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work, Instructor in Residence at the UConn School of Social Work, and Fairfield resident in strong support of SB 184 and HB 5262, both of which would expand eligibility for voting by absentee ballot.

At the Humphreys Institute, we examine voting as a social determinate of health, a human right, and a powerful tool for shaping public policy. Voter participation is essential to a strong democracy, one that represents and responds to the needs of all citizens.

This should not be partisan issue nor manipulated as a threat to a secure election. The act of voting brings positive benefits to individuals and communities. Communities who vote in higher rates are better off in important ways, including stronger social connections, higher employment and greater community well-being. Individuals who vote report higher levels of wellness in a variety of measures. Voting is an act of power and self-determination. One 2018 study of adolescents and young adults reported voting to be positively associated with higher income, higher educational achievement, and mental health. States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation have better health outcomes across multiple measures. (Health and Democracy Index, <https://democracyindex.hdhp.us/>)

Every state, including ours, should be supporting policies that allow people to vote safely, securely and easily. No one should have to choose between their job, their health, or their family and their right to vote. Not only should we keep Covid as a reason for 2022 (SB 184), HB 5262 would expand permanently the definition for illness and disability by clarifying the eligibility to vote by Absentee Ballot in state statute to align with our state Constitution.

In the last decade, we have had three major Election Day crises in our cities: in Hartford when the ballots had not arrived when polls opened (2015); New Haven when the line for Election Day Registration hours long (2018); and Bridgeport when some locations ran out of ballots (2010). The Humphreys Institute staff also witnessed and called state election officials in this last election when the line at Grace Lutheran church in Hartford exceeded 2 hours at times.

Every state, including ours, should be supporting policies that allow people to vote safely, securely and easily.

Sources for all the studies and events mentioned are included here. I am also happy to provide additional detail or research on these issues. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Tanya Rhodes Smith

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